

[The House of Flowers]

Life History

Jones Flower Shop

Miss Willie Jones

Cor. Clayton and College Ave.

Florist.

Grace McCune

Feb, 21-1939

Feb. 25-1939

The House Of Flowers

Opening the door of Miss Smith's flower shop, I entered a room which was more like a flower garden, than a room. There was flowers of every variety, the cut flowers were arranged around the room, in large baskets and pots of blooming plants were arranged on tables at the windows and on a table in the center was a long table, on which was vases of cut flowers as well as some of the pots of flowers. Several large [palms?] arranged around in the room added much to the attraction of the room. One end of the room was taken up with two large frigidaires which was filled with cut flowers of every kind. A large settee, and two large chairs was placed so that cutomers customers and visitors might enjoy the flowers as they waited.

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Miss Smith was waiting on two boys, and as I waited for her to finish with her customers, I couldn't help but hear the conversation. The boys wanted her prices on corsanages corsages for their girls to wear at a dance. She gave her prices on different kinds of flowers, and they finally [decided?] on orchids. Asking if she could have them ready in time for the dance the next evening. After assuring them that they would be ready and delivered in plenty of time, the boys went out.

She then asked what she could do for me. I explained my visit and asked if she would mind telling me something about her business, as I was told, she had the most popular shope shop in town[.?] “well you will have to come back in the work room with me, she replied, for I have some orders to get out that came in the morning's mail. But they are just cut flowers for their friends who are in the hospitals.

I asked if she got very many orders that way, Oh, Yes, she said, “I get them most every day, and you know I appreciat appreciate them, and am proud of these 2 orders, for it [makes?] me think that my customers have confidence in me. Why some times, I get the [order?], saying just send an order for me, telling the price, but not what kind of flowers they want. For instance this one that came this morning, it is from a woman from in a near by town, and she did not even say what she wanted, except, please send a three dollar order of flowers for me to a freind friend that is in the hospital there.

“that just leaves it up to me, and I try to do the best that I [?] can, [and?] fix them as I would for myself. And for this order, which is for a woman, I am sending pink [carnations?], as I think they are lovely in a sick room, and too this is [an?] easy order to fill, for the woman that is sick is a very good customer of mine and I know that carnations are her favorite flowers.

“And very often I have new customers come in and tell that some of my old customers sent them to me. And I appreciated that, and I try to let them know that I do appreciate it. I have a very nice customer [? ? ? ? ?] who has sent many new customers, and through her

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connections with several fraternal societies, has thrown quiet a bit of business my way. I had an opportunity not so long ago to let her know that I appreciated all this.

“She lost her brother in another town. I had a good many orders to fill for that funeral. But when she called me and ask me to fix her flowers, I ask if/ I might fix just [what?] I wanted to fix. She [readily?] gave consent, saying, I have never been disappointed in you yet. And the casket spray that I fixed, using all white flowers, was really lovely, and I wanted it to be that way. But I was not expecting the messages that I received regarding that spray. One was from the Undertaker in charge of the funeral. And he wrote me a card saying, that they were often asked 3 by the families that they served to order flowers for them. And that all the flowers that came from my shop were so lovely, and the casket spray was the loviest loviest spray that they had ever handled. And he wanted to know if I could fill orders for them. And that was from a much larger town than this one.

A customer came in and she went out to wait on him. As I waited I looked around the work room. It was not a large room and a long table with high stools around it was where she was working. Built in cabinets held supplies of everything that she used in her work, and a long rod at one side of the table held both wax and tissue paper that she used in fixing up the flowers to send out. One large cabinet with glass doors held a supply of tulle in all colors and shades. And a large desk, [showed?] that she also used this room as her office.

Miss Smith came back in her work room laughing and said “poor boy this is the third time he has been today to look at those red roses. Tomorrow is the birthday of his girl friend, she will be twenty, he said and he wants to send her twenty red roses. But red roses are rather expensive this time of the year. But he will get them yet, he wants them so bad.

“Last week I had a large order for corsages for the Valentine ball, they wanted sweetheart roses. I had a time trying to get them, but finally I found one place that said that they could send me all I wanted. I ask them to send them at once. They came in the morning, that I was suppose to have them ready in the evening. And when I

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unpacked them, I found a card saying that they were sorry, they did not know that were out of sweetheart roses when I gave the order, but that they were sending the large roses and hoped that I might be able to use them.

"It was too late to try anywhere else, and too I had tried everywhere.

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and couldn't find any? And I just had to make the small roses out of the large ones. Yes it was a job, but in this kind of work, you come up against all kinds of jobs, and the work is when we have large orders to fill, we sometimes work day and night to get them out on time, for that is one thing we have to do, and that is to be prompt in getting out orders for flowers.

I asked her how long she had been in this business? "most all of my life she replied. But I have only been in business for myself sixteen years. It was a hard pull, but I have [?] made it from a very poor beginning to what I have now. But you know I spent all of this morning in mailing checks for every bill that I owe. Of course I should have done it yesterday, but I was just so busy that I didn't have time.

But [?] to get back as to how I started. I have loved flowers all my life, and we always had lovely ones at our home. My father was not what you would call wealthy, but we had a good living and a large home. There were six of us children, and we were all in school, when my father lost most everything he had except our home, by going on notes for his friends. And that has been a lesson to me in my business.

"We children had to stop school and go to work, and that is [?] when I really really began to know that we could make money out of our flowers One of my sisters and I worked with the flowers, and we soon had a large greenhouse built for the hot house flowers. And every bit of our ground at our home was planted in flowers. We built up a good business,

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of [?] course there were many things that we had to learn. But we were both determined to see it through, and we are both at it yet.

“A few years later, we built a swimming swimming pool on our place and built a danceing dancing pavilion pavilion . This was soon a very popular place in the summer 5 for swimming and danceing dancing as well as picnics. We kept the pool the pool cleaned out and had cemented it. It filled from a large spring. And we were making good with it as well as our flowers business. But she got to where most of the work was left to me, and the break came very soon after that.

“One after noon she was entertaining the Community Club. The boy that worked for us and I was cleaning out the pool, as we had it rented for the evening to one of the social groups for a picnic and swimming swimming . I was so tired, just give out, for we had even scrubbed the cement bottom of the pool.

“I had just finished and was sitting down on the bank to rest, when she came walking up and ask me what I was doing, resting I said, for I am realy really tired out. She said well if I hated the country as bad as you do, I would get out of it. If you don't like this, why don't you get out and go in busines business for your self. This made me mad, for I had worked so hard to build up our business and it realy belonged to both of us together.

“But that is when I decided I would get out and see if I could not do better, and that is where I started. A friend of mine and I went into the business together. I came to town and rented a small place. That made my sister so mad for she did not think that I would get out, and she she did everything in her power to stop me. Even went so far as tell the telephone Co. That they could not install a phone in my name. Or my place of business.

“I went to see a lawyer about this, he ask if the Smith Flower Co. which was the way that we listed in the directory, was incorporated. I told him it was not. Then he said, there is no way in the world or by law that she can keep you from haveing a telephone in your

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name. And he called the telephone co. It wasn't very long until they were there to install my telephone.

"We had built a large greenhouse together, and I thought she would let me use that, at least for a while, and we had a car that we bought together to deliver our flowers. In fact I had really really paid more in the car than she had. But bless your soul, she went up in the air, wouldn't even let me use the car to deliver my orders until I could get one.

"I have always detested the idea of giving up anything that I had started. So the more she tried to stop me, the harder I tried. But it was hard, I had to build me a greenhouse, and it cost me \$2500. and buy another car, for those were two things that I had to have if I was going to stay in business. I soon started to building my own house, I would get a little done and have to stop and wait until I got more money. The contractor, said Miss Smith, let me go ahead and finish up the house, and then you can finish paying me later. But I would not do that, for I always like to see where I am at, and I did not know, they way my sister was trying to stop me, if I was going to be able to keep the shop going. This was in the fall of the year, and my partner ask me if would not use some of his money to finish up the house, so that I could get in before cold weather, for I needed some one to see that the heat was kept on in the green house. I saw that he was right, and did as he said, and I had it finished up to where I could move in before it got real cold. But I had him paid back, every cent by the early spring, and i made improvements on my home until I have a lovely eight room house, and modern in every way, except gas. Yes it was tough, but as my partner said one day, when I was unusually blue, remember that old saying, you can't keep a good woman down.

"But I have worked and made good and my people still impose [?] on / me. I have improved my property, and have several nice cottages built. I have two young men working for me. One of them is my nephew. They are both married and I furnish them both a house, lights and water and I guess coal [also?], for my coal bill is seventeen dollars

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every two weeks. And I pay them a good salary, for this work is not like most any other kind of work. For we have to work all hours some times.

“My nephew is supposed to help me here in the shop when he he is not busy out at the house, and especially to deliver orders. But half of the Time I do not know where he is at. His wife helps me in the shop when I am busy. But I sure do have to pay her. I am always doing some thing for them, but they do not offer to do anything for me, unless I pay for it.

“They have two children, and I am always buying something for [them?] but they do not appreciate that. And I pay more bills for things that I never see, and he and the boy at the place do pretty much as they please. Why I have got in a rush and called out there for them, only to find they had gone fishing or hunting. They think that because Jim is my nephew, that they are priviledged privileged to do as they please. And use my cars to make these trips in and even charge the gas to me. I guess I am just to easy on them.

But I Own my business myself now, and have had to move twice , to have more room for the shop since I started out in the small place. I have all that I can do. My sister thinks that I should do more for my folks than I do. but I can't see it that way. And don't see hardly how I could do much more, I do not keep any of them in the house with me, I tried that, but it didn't work, we could not get along. But I do furnish a home for one of my sisters, also one of my brother and his family, and help feed them of course my father and mother are both dead, and I think I do as much, in-fact much more than any of the rest, for the ones that I mentioned.

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“And they think they keep up with what I make, through my nephew, but I have learned not to let him know, for he will take no interest in the work, will not look after the shop at all. I know that I need to get out and take a trip or rest up, but bad as [?] I need it, I can't afford to just get out and leave it by its self.

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Another customer came in and as she went to wait on him, I [?] noticed some pictures over her desk. Two of them was lovely tinted pictures of little girls, and one of a little boy, that was still just a baby. But the one that attracted me most, was a picture of a small grave of a child, it was decorated in the christmas decorations, and a christmas tree all lighted up was by the side of it, with a large star in the top of the tree.

Miss Smith came back in the room smileing smiling, and said "I told you so, the boy could not resist the red roses for his girl, he came back and ordered them, and now he is happy, and I hope that she will be just as happy when she gets them, as he is in sending them.

Two more customers came in, both boys, One wanted tailsman talisman roses sent to a young girl, and the other wanted a pot of flowers for a sick friend. She was very considerate and explained about the different pot flowers and helped him to make his selection. And for more than an hour and a half she was busy with customers.

And as she finished with the last ones, a rather poorly dressed boy came. She was just as nice to him as she had been to the others showing him over the shop and all her flowers. After he left she said I wish that I knew who that boy is. I am so sorry for him, he comes in 9 most every day just to look at the flowers, he is realy a lover of flowers. And I imagine he can't afford to buy them. I often give him a bunch of flowers. He is more like a child than a man.

As she finished making a record of her orders, I asked her about the pictures of the children, [?] especially of the grave. "They are my nephews children she replied, and this one, taking down the picture of the largest child, is the one that is buried in that little grave. She was my favorite, I love them all, but she just seemed to think more of me. And she was killed accidently by a truck, just a few weeks before Christmas. This was a few years ago, "And she did love her Christmas trees, and we keep one at her grave during the season, and brightly lighted, as she always wanted hers to be. She was such a bright child, and every one loved her.

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A man came in and she went to see what he wanted, but he was a salesman, and she told him she did not need anything. He ask about pots, she said no, I don't need a thing. He said aren't you ever going to forget abo about that old order. I told you that I was not in need of anything she replied. He thanked her and went out.

She said, "I wish that he would stop coming in here, he gave me a dirty deal one time on an order, and I can't forget about it. It was a rather large order, just hundreds of pots for one thing, pot of every size for we use so many of them, but the order ran into several hundred dollars and he just over charged me on everything I ordered. I received a price list with the shippment of goods.

I guess I should have reported him, but I didn't, but I do not give him any more orders, and he does hate to miss the large orders that I give. For in buying things that I need all the time, I try to buy in large orders and watch to see that I do not run out of anything. For I have a IO place at the house where I can store a good many [XXXXXd?] things.

"But I am beginning to believe that I am going to have to stop that or have it changed some way. And she laughed, "you know I always buy my foliage in large quanties, not less than a hundred pounds at a time. Well I keep that at the house also and just bring it in as I need it And just before christmas, I had just about used up what I had here in the shop.

"I knew that I would need more in makeing making up my christmas baskets I called the house and told the boy to bring me in a supply. He called me back in few minutes, and siad said that there was none there. I was so sure that I told him to look again. But he couldn't find any. My nephew was here while I was talking to the other boy, but he did not say anything.

"When I went home that night, I found that the boy was right, I did not have any foliage. I just couldn't imagine what in the world had gone with it. But right after christmas, I found

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out what went withit. My nephew said his wife sold more than a hundred dollars worth of these little christmas pots at the ten cent stores. and I knew then where my supplies went.

“No they did not ever say anything to me about it. They never do. But still they don't pull as many things over me as they think they do. Yet they did get a cow stall built and had a cow in it before I knew anything at all about it. Jim that is my nephew, had built a high trellis between my house and the cow stall. She laughed and said “They feel so sure they will get all I have when I am gone, so I guess they think they might as well use it now.

More customers [came?] in and she went out to wait on them, and when she came back she said, “this has been a rather dull day with me, ll but I guess I need it, as I have been in a rush for several days. “ She had been working on some orders as she talked, and having them ready, she called the house to see if Jim was there, so he could come in and make the deliveries.

It was sometime before any one answered, and then it was his wife, and she said he was not there. Miss Smith called a taxi[a?] [taxi?] and made her deliveries. But she showed plainly that she did not like it. [?] Finally she said that is just the way it is most of the time. They think they can do me any way, but they will go too far one of these days.

“Why last spring I had so much work that I wanted done out at the house, and I do not like to overwork / anyone. So I got a settled man to go out and help them out. And after he finished his work, he said, Miss Smith, I do not like to tell things, but you just don't know how things are going out there. When I went to work out there, they gave me some advice, and it was this, see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing. As Jim had been getting by, I must not tell on him.

Miss Smith laughed and said, “I fired both of them last fall, for going off when I needed them very bad. They didn't think that I would do it. I sent for another boy to take their place. And do you know what those boys done? Well they went and told the boy that I had changed my mind, and when I came down the next morning to come to work, Jim was

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there waiting in the car, and the other boy was already at work trimming the hedges. They had a good job, and couldn't do any one else like they did me. But for a while they did fine, I got more work done than I had ever got out of them before.

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"I am going to have to have Jim's wife help me tomorrow for I have to get out those orders for the dance. But I usually pay her four or five dollars a day when she helps me, but she is good help, and really really works. But she will not offer to help me unless I ask her, and then she knows that she will get paid for it.

"And some of them are always borrowing money, but they don't ever think of paying back. No, they would not think of doing any one else that way. I guess they just figure that I don't need it. But I pay them all for what they do for me. And they have all the flowers that they want, at any time they want them. And I like to see them put flowers in their houses.

"But the children are really really a pleasure running about the [?] house when I am at home, for it is lonesome some times, especially when I am at home on Sunday. I do my own cooking, but I do have some one to come in and do the cleaning. And last Sunday one of my friends was visiting me, and she said, 'I knew that you was crazy about flowers, but I did not know that you was bad as you are, do you know how many vases of flowers you have in your house? [.?]

"No I replied, I never count them, but I do like to have flowers every where. My friend laughed and said, well I have counted fifty-two and I don't know how many more there are. She really likes my home, and I do have a nice home, it is just out of the city limits, and I have several smaller cottages on the place that I rent, and I don't have any trouble in renting them.

"I of course have electricity, as the lines go by the place. [But?] I use an electric pump to furnish water for the houses, but we have plenty of it. And about the only thing we don't have is gas. But we can cook with electricity. We are in the country, but have all the

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conveniences of town. And as it is on a paved highway, we have no trouble running in 13 to town.

"I come in quiet often to shows as that is about all that I have time for. And I go to church on Sunday, yet some times my work make us work on Sunday also. And some times I can get some of them to stay at the house on Sunday, then I can get away for a day, and that really really helps for this work is so confining as you never know when some will call for a order, and want it in a hurry.

"I very often think of what our old negro cook told me one time when I was little, she was trying to make me do something, and I did not want to do it, well she jus turned me across her lap, and then gave me the only whipping that I ever had. She told me then, 'some dese days youse gwine'r has ter do, and what youse gwine'r do, less'en youse knows how.

"And how right she was, I have really really had to work, but inspite of all my handicaps, I have made a good living and am trying to lay aside plenty to take care of me when I get to where I can't work. I have several very good inestments investments in stocks, and I like that much better than building houses to rent, for there is always something to do on them, just repairs all the time. For most of the people that rent will not take care of a place, just because it is not theirs.

"I have a time with my social securities and records, infact I [?] still do not understand them, and really really don't know what it all means. But I do not object to it, and am willing to do my part. It was a little complicated at first to get my reports just right, but I guess they pass for I don't hear anything from them after I send them off.

"My sister wanted to know only last Sunday, how much insurance I was carring carrying on myself. Not any at all, I replied. She was shocked, and gave me a raking over the coals, as the old cook use to say. I asked her why should I? [?]that I didn't have any one to leave it to, and I thought I had enough to take care of myself. I guess they want all they can get.

“And the first of this year, I made a resolution, not to lend any one any money during this year.

“Have you kept the resolution” I ask. She laughed heartily, “I did for one day, or maybe two, and then Jim and the other boy also wanted ten dollars each, and of course they got it. They just know how to get next to me.

She went out to the front to wait on a customer, and when she came back into the work room she said, “The rain is coming down in torrents, and I have to send out some of these flowers, guess I will have to use a taxi again for Jim is not here yet and it is most time to go home. I am sure he will be here to drive me home, for I do not drive myself.

“It is a good thing I have not been busy today, for I should have needed him. I wondered why she called it a dull day for business, for she had been working hard all the time she was talking, and as I was getting ready to leave, I thanked her for the nice story, and also for giving me so much of her time. “I was glad to” she replied, “I am glad that you came, for I don't like to be by myself.

As I went out, a man came, which was evidently Jim, for she wanted to know where he had been all day, and I bet that he had to put up some mighty good excuse.